
The Record Society
of
Lancashire and Cheshire



Official Newsletter

No. 6 2025

Welcome from the RSLC

Thank you for reading the latest *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Newsletter*, and for your interest in our Society. The RSLC – established in 1878 – is a registered charity which aims to promote understanding of, and public interest in, the history of Lancashire and Cheshire – including Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and Preston – through the publication of editions of historical records and other activities.

If you are a member of the Society, we are very grateful for your support. If not, you can find out more about the RSLC, including details about how to join (and receive our annual volumes in return for your £20 subscription), at <http://rslc.org.uk/>. Alternatively, you can write to Diana Dunn at East Manley Hall, Manley Lane, Manley, Frodsham, WA6 9JE or d.dunn@chester.ac.uk

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The RSLC in 2024

Last year saw the publication of Jonathan Oates's fascinating edition, RSLC volume 159, *Prisoners of the Fifteen*. In drawing together all the known evidence for those imprisoned after the Battle of Preston in 1715, this volume sheds important new light on the size and composition of the Jacobite forces. The edition has been very favourably reviewed as 'a major reference work for those interested in the Jacobite army'.

We were pleased to welcome a large audience, both in person and online, for the annual Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture at our March AGM, delivered this year by our president, Martin Heale. Professor Heale's talk on 'Robin Hood in the Medieval and Early Modern North-West' explored the famous outlaw's various connections with Lancashire and Cheshire, while taking care not to downplay his Yorkshire origins! We were also delighted to welcome Dr Bertie Dockerill, of the University of Manchester, as a new member of the RSLC Council. You can learn more about Dr Dockerill's research on p. 3, below.

Annual General Meeting 2025

The society's AGM will be taking place on **Thursday 27 March**, in the Liverpool Central Library (Meeting Rooms 1-2) starting at 1.45pm. It will be followed at 2.00pm by the **Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture**, which will this year be given by Dr Bertie Dockerill and Dr Marc Collinson, on '**A Window into Political Change: Preserving Local Labour Party Papers from the 1970s**'. This talk will introduce Dr Dockerill and Dr Collinson's upcoming RSLC volume *Realities of Reorganisation: Manchester City Labour Group's Experience of Reformed Local Government, 1973–1977*.

Bertie Dockerill is a historian with research interests in the history of urban planning, and is Lecturer in Planning at the University of Manchester. Marc Collinson is a political historian of post-war Britain, interested in electoral phenomena, political parties and policymaking. He is Lecturer in Political History at the University of Bangor.

ALL ARE WELCOME! Our AGM and public lecture will also be livestreamed via Zoom, for those who would like to join us online. To register for the AGM and lecture, please contact Diana Dunn (d.dunn@chester.ac.uk) in advance of the meeting, providing your email address and confirming whether you would like to attend in person or online.

The Society's Annual Report and financial accounts will be made available on our website (<http://rslc.org.uk/>) in advance of the AGM.

RSLC member subscriptions

After more than a decade where our subscription rates have been frozen, the Council has decided to recommend a rise in member subscriptions to take effect in 2026. It goes without saying that the Society's costs have risen considerably in recent years, including for postage and storage. At the same time, our finances have been affected by low interest rates for savings. There has also been a steady decline in our membership over the past ten years, both institutional (as local libraries, in particular, have needed to make cutbacks) and individual. We have been conscious that our members have likewise been affected by the rise in living costs, and have therefore sought to keep our subscriptions rates stable for as long as possible. We have now concluded, however, that to safeguard the short- and medium-term position of the Society, a rise in subscriptions cannot be any further delayed.

For the past decade, our annual subscription rates have been as follows:

Individual: £20 for UK residents; £25 for overseas

Institutional: £25 for UK institutions; £30 (or US\$60) for overseas

At the 2025 AGM, the Council will propose new subscription rates, namely:

Individual: £25 for UK residents; £30 for overseas

Institutional: £35 for UK institutions; £40 (or US\$80) for overseas

We believe these revised rates still represent good value for an annual hardback volume. The proposed rise in subscriptions will be subject to the approval of members at the AGM in March.

*DR BERTIE DOCKERILL and DR MARC COLLINSON tell us about their upcoming RSLC volume, which is scheduled to be published during 2025 as RSLC volume 161. **Realities of Reorganisation: Manchester City Labour Group's Experience of Reformed Local Government, 1973–1977** provides rich insight into the development of local government policy in Manchester and into the activities and political culture of the city's Labour party.*

What are your backgrounds and areas of expertise as researchers?

Bertie: Though presently employed as a lecturer in town planning and environmental management, I'm really an historian, and completed my first PhD in Local History at the University of Leicester on local government reform and issues of identity and belonging. Since then, I've branched out into the history of nineteenth-century local planning and social housing, the early development of greenbelts, and the expansion of towns (and their governance) into traditional rural areas, hence my present role at the University of Manchester. If I had the funding to pursue the interest, I'd like to write on the development of student voice from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Marc: I started out as a historian of the Labour Party and 'Commonwealth Immigration' policy. However, part of my focus was always linked to localised contexts (Smethwick and the Pennine textile belt) and my research has developed more along this vein, predominantly due to my interests in British elections. I am also becoming very interested in post-war town twinning.

What first drew you to this set of records?

We're both interested in different aspects of local government and local politics, from historic and functional perspectives. Having met at a conference that Marc organised in Bangor on 'Shaping the Labour Party' in 2015, we have spent the best part of a decade discussing ways in which we could, when we both had time, work together on a local government and history monograph. From work that we both undertook preparing funding bids to the Leverhulme Trust and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, we were aware of this set of records, their wider significance, and the need for them to be transcribed if they were to become more readily accessible. The papers were handed to Bangor University by a Manchester Councillor in the early 2000s and were a natural focus for the project. We were also keen to contribute a more contemporary volume to the work of the Record Society.

What do we learn about the key issues and challenges confronting local government in 1970s Manchester from these records?

Despite the fact that local government – for better or for worse – impacts our lives daily, very few studies have been undertaken that have focused on the internal development of policies at a micro 'local-party' level. Though the local government reforms of the 1970s represented a root and branch reform of the system, they did not immediately result in

either an influx of new councillors or a plethora of new ideas. Instead, as the internal minutes illustrate, the ruling group in Manchester sought largely to carry on as it had previously, with policy priorities – such as Manchester Airport, and not cutting budgets/increasing local rates – remaining unchanged. In practical terms, the 1972 Local Government Act required the new city council to work ‘in harmony’ with the wider Greater Manchester Council (GMC). Here the minutes suggest two things. First, that the more ‘regional’ dimensions of co-operation and policy alignment appear almost to take place in an ad hoc and ‘regional committee’ structure that impacted more on Council officers and leaders rather than ‘ordinary’ elected members. Second, for a majority of its considerations, the issues that remained foremost in councillors’ minds were those at the ‘city’ (or ward) level rather than the level of the GMC.

What can these records tell us about the Labour Party in the 1970s that is not widely known?

Much existent consideration of Labour Party council politics in the north-west in the 1970s has centred on Liverpool and Militant. These minutes give little indication of there having been any form of comparable Militant tendency within early-mid 1970s Manchester Labour (within the city council). Likewise, there is little evidence of earlier left versus right divisions within the Labour group in the period. Instead, the minutes suggest a relatively constant level of consensus within the group on key policy aspects. Surprisingly, there do not appear to be any notable instances of individual councillors ‘taking a stance’ against the group on any emergent ward issue.

What is the most unexpected or exciting material you’ve uncovered in these records?

The extent of the Council’s role in the management of the airport (especially concessions), the repurposing of the Manchester Lord Mayor’s summer residence at Dalehead in the Lake District, and the interest among councillors for junkets to Leningrad were all unexpected elements. They give a sense of colour and variety in the activities of local government that are rarely considered. That one member asked his neighbour in a meeting whether the film ‘The Man who would be King’ was any good was also an unexpected piece of marginalia... one, to which, the editors of this volume would answer ‘yes’.

How would you hope your volume would be useful for historical researchers in the future?

We hope it opens up avenues on how urban local government was run and gives a sense to scholars of the issues and pressures that were faced. These minutes are unusual, as they add colour and political depth to the usual Council yearbooks and collections of minutes. We are able to see behind the bureaucratic structures and get more of a sense of the political concerns faced by local councillors.

Are there any lessons for today's councillors or politicians that we can draw from these records?

We can see that minute books in the 1970s, much like what we see today, are more outlines of decisions rather than what was debated. While this level of recording may make life easier for officials, it means that we rarely get a sense of what was debated, how seriously and contentiously arguments were made, and how varied opinion was within the body. Perhaps a recognition of how useful verbatim transcripts of debates are for historians would be nice, but we know that is unlikely to happen.



Dr Dockerill and Dr Collinson reflect on the issues and challenges confronting local government in 1970s Manchester



STEPHEN ROBERTS, local historian and longstanding member of the RSLC Council, tells us about his ongoing project cataloguing the medieval archives of **Poulton Hall**, near Bebington. This little-studied collection of documents has much to reveal about the history of medieval Wirral.

In 2019 an old school friend introduced me to a voluntary group called Wirral Archaeology. Some of the lands they have been studying are within reach of Wirral's longest surviving country manor house, which is inhabited by the same family who acquired it in 1093. It is Poulton Hall, occupied by the Lancelyn Greens. You might have heard of Roger Lancelyn Green (1918-1987), the father of its current owner, Scirard. Roger was a children's author and biographer of C. S. Lewis. His priceless collection of children's literature is housed within Poulton Hall's library. Roger's younger son, Richard (1953-2004), was also a literary scholar and expert on Conan Doyle. Wirral Archaeology have befriended Scirard and his wife Caroline, who have very kindly given the group access to the family's private archives, many of which are kept in a medieval box within the aforementioned highly atmospheric and beautiful library.

I was asked to co-ordinate the cataloguing, transcription and analysis of the Poulton Hall archives. Since June 2024, I and some other volunteers have processed about half the contents of the medieval box. There are about forty medieval Latin charters and deeds dating from about 1280 to 1550, interspersed with scribbled genealogical notes, recipes, lists of tenants, receipts, a character reference for an apothecary named Tobias Parnell from Congleton and other ephemera, all of which, in time, with careful analysis and cross-referencing, will yield valuable information about the history of the hall, its occupants and life in Wirral in past times.

Utilising the training I have received at the Keele University Latin Palaeography Summer School, and my acquaintance with other learners and with our excellent teachers and advisors, Chris Whittick, Simon Harris and Paul Booth, I have begun to transcribe a number of the medieval documents and to make some interesting discoveries.

One of the Poulton Hall documents contains minor place names which were unknown even to the great Charles McNeil Dodgson, editor of the *Place Names of Cheshire* volumes. I was so thrilled with these toponyms that I sent them to distinguished philologist, Paul Cavill, who expressed great interest and asked if he could incorporate this new data into the forthcoming second edition of his *Dictionary of English Field Names*. One of these names is 'Doreyard Burn'. It is intriguing in two respects – first, as the Norse word 'burn' has never before been seen in Wirral, where streams are usually called 'brooks', and second because 'Doreyard' means 'door yard' and refers to a plot of land lying very close to the back door of a dwelling. This,

according to Paul Cavill, is the first known use of the term (fourteenth century) and its only known use in England. It had previously only ever been spotted in records from eighteenth-century America.

Other medieval documents mention fisheries on the Mersey and the need to have fresh fish on a Thursday, ready for fish Friday's dinner; woodlands in Bebington where pigs could feed on the acorns; bridges across the River Dibben and Bromborough Pool; marl pits and assarts; relations with the abbot of Chester; and details of a number of local people, not all of whom were gentry or nobility. You will gather from this short summary that there is enough archival and archaeological material here to enable the rewriting of the history of medieval Wirral. We are not yet sure about the actual form that this rewriting will take, but if you would like to be involved in the process in any way in which you might feel able, please contact me at: northwesthistory58@gmail.com



Seventeenth-century brewhouse at Poulton Hall, Wirral. Photograph by Phil Nash from Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 & GFDL